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CHRISTIANITY AND DEMOCRACY¹

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Whatever the outcome of the war, it has already rendered the world an immense service in defining with unexampled clearness and on a hitherto unmatched scale an ethical issue of the profoundest and most far-reaching significance. I do not mean the old issue raised by every war since the time of Christ—whether war is ever right and to engage in it ever Christian. That question is largely academic and in existing circumstances of altogether minor importance. In a situation like the present, Christian men as well as other men will fight, and fight with a good conscience, whatever may be said as to the abstract right or wrong of war, or as to its consonance with Christian principles. It would be easy to show that to identify Christianity with pacifism, as many devout and eager Christians are doing, is profoundly to misinterpret it and to lose sight altogether of its great controlling principles. But I am concerned this morning with another matter altogether—the fundamental moral issue raised by this particular war and Christianity's relation to that issue. I refer—to put it in a single phrase—to the issue between autocracy and democracy.

It is a mistake to regard this as a political issue merely, an issue with which Christianity has nothing to do. It is easy to regard it thus, for during the past fifteen hundred years Christian governments have been more

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frequently autocratic than democratic, and devout Christians have not only lived as contentedly in autocratic as in democratic states, but have even ruled with as good a conscience in the one as in the other.

But the events of the past four years have abundantly shown that the traditional neutrality of Christians and the Christian Church has been misplaced, that the issue between autocracy and democracy is a moral, not only a political issue, and that Christianity is profoundly concerned in it, as it is in all moral issues. The transfer of the age-long struggle between autocracy and democracy from the field of politics to the field of morals is, I take it, the most significant consequence of these four years of war.

The war did not begin as a contest between autocracy and democracy, any more than our Civil War began as a struggle over slavery. But as the Emancipation Proclamation made explicit an issue that had been involved from the outset, so the course of recent events, interpreted for the world at large by President Wilson, has made explicit an issue that was really already there, and has changed the war from a mere conflict between nations to a conflict between ideas. The South always insisted that the question of slavery was an economic, not a moral question, but the conscience of the North read it in moral terms and the North's victory put it permanently into the moral realm. We may in the past have believed that the question between autocracy and democracy is exclusively political, but it has now become to us and to our allies a moral question, and its moral character will not be again forgotten.

The recognition of the moral character of the issue between autocracy and democracy is due in no small part to Germany's unscrupulousness in the choice of means for the attainment of her ends. It is a profound remark that "the end does not justify the means but

is judged by the means." What autocracy is has been borne in upon the consciousness of the world by Germany's flouting of all moral considerations in her conduct of the war. The end must be unholy for which such means seem fit.

Brought under the inspection of the moral sense of the world at large, as it has not been before, autocracy, we are everywhere coming to see, like its twin sister imperialism, is not accidentally but essentially immoral, immoral not simply when it commits atrocities such as Germany has been committing, but immoral even when on its best behavior. The basis of all morality is mutuality. Autocracy is fundamentally evil because it denies to others rights and responsibilities which it arrogates to itself. Its motive may be wholly bad — the mere selfish and brutal will to power — or its motive may conceivably be good. The autocrat may interest himself in the welfare and happiness of those he rules and may believe them happier because he rules them. But the viciousness of autocracy is not thereby relieved. Whether exercised for good or evil ends it violates the cardinal principle of morality: it treats men as machines instead of persons, as things to be manipulated and controlled instead of free beings gifted with the privilege of choosing for themselves even to their own hurt. However much the autocrat may protest his consideration for his subjects, and his desire for their welfare, his attitude toward them is profoundly cynical.

With disregard for the rights of others is naturally associated contempt for their opinions and principles, and it is no accident that autocratic Germany in the present war shows scant respect for the moral judgments of the world at large. It is not Germany but autocracy that is betraying its true character in acting thus.

The subject upon which I wish to speak today is Christianity and Democracy. From the Christian point

of view the cardinal vice of autocracy is its denial of genuine human brotherhood — of the kinship and equality and liberty that brotherhood involves. To enslave another man is as unchristian as to destroy him. To count him an underling is as unchristian as to count him an enemy. This we have not always realized; under the stress of the present crisis we are beginning to realize it now.

Christianity began with a marked emphasis on love for others, and throughout Christian history love has remained a fundamental Christian virtue. To be sure its range was early narrowed, and love for the brethren usurped the place of love for all men. It was also crowded into a subordinate place by the growing emphasis on purity and unworldliness, so that in course of time the ideal Christian came to be the uncompromising ascetic rather than the loving and helpful neighbor and friend. But even so love remained a cardinal virtue and ever and anon its preëminence was reasserted. We live in an age when it has established itself as the supreme expression of Christian character, when to treat all men as brothers is recognized as the Christian's chief duty.

But unfortunately an essential element in brotherhood has been commonly overlooked. The love for which the early Christians stood was love between equals, not between superiors and inferiors. This explains in part the confinement of Christian love to the Christian brethren. They were on an equality of privilege and responsibility not shared by others and not affected by differences in worldly rank and possessions. As the circle of Christian brotherhood widened with the nominal conversion of the Roman world, this notion of Christian brotherhood, equalizing all the inequalities of life, became more and more of a fiction. To show a man Christian love now too often meant to assume not an essential equality between him and you but an essential inequality, enabling

you to exercise the congenial and condescending virtue of charity. Charity indeed came to seem peculiarly Christian just because of the lack of mutuality in it. On such a basis, of course, so long as it is benevolent, despotism is as Christian as democracy. Indeed, the benevolent despot, like the benevolent millionaire, has a larger and more splendid opportunity for Christian service than the ordinary man.

You recognize in this an attitude still common in democratic America as well as in autocratic Germany. Where it prevails, the Christian character of political as well as of economic autocracy passes unquestioned. So long as the Kaiser treats his people benevolently and gives them a good government, he is acting the part of a Christian prince, is acting all the more Christianly because he is doing it of his own free will and not under the compulsion of a constitution. So long as a powerful State controls and governs a weaker people in such a way as to insure their comfort and promote their prosperity, it is acting the part of a Christian State even though it has never secured the consent of the governed. Similarly, so long as an employer is kind to his employees — building model cottages, providing free lunches, giving frequent bonuses, and the like — he is acting the part of a Christian employer, even though he joins with others of his class in perpetuating the bondage of the wage-earner and in hindering the growth of economic freedom.

In modern times there has been a dawning suspicion that this attitude is immoral. But the suspicion has been hitherto confined largely to social radicals and reformers. Only now with the new emphasis on democracy and the growing apprehension of its meaning has the suspicion begun to penetrate the mind of the world at large, including the Christian Church. There is in it the promise of a revolution, social as well as political, of unexampled magnitude.

It is the barbarity and ruthlessness of Germany that has shocked the moral sentiment of the world and the Church, but the shock is awakening us to a realization of the essential evil of all autocracy and imperialism, economic as well as political, benevolent as well as cruel. It is not surprising that public opinion everywhere outside Germany has instinctively revolted against Bernhardi's brutal declaration that "the notion that a weak nation has the same right to live as a powerful nation is a presumptuous encroachment on the natural law of development." The significant thing is that the same public opinion is revolting not merely against the anti-Christian principle that the stronger nation has a right to crush the weaker, but against the farther principle, whose anti-Christian character has not hitherto been realized, that the stronger nation has the right to control the weaker. In other days, so long as the control was based, or claimed to be based, upon regard for the weaker nation's good, we commonly assumed, in our blindness, that whatever might be thought of it politically it was at any rate consonant with Christian principles and to be tolerated by the Christian Church. But now public opinion in all the countries of the Entente is going further even than the most sensitive Christian conscience formerly went, and is refusing to be satisfied with anything less than democracy within the nations and among the nations, with anything less than freedom and independence both for individuals and states. The political consequences of this steadily growing refusal we can begin faintly to imagine, the significance of it for Christian ethics we can already clearly see.

In other days the Church would have defined Christian brotherhood solely in terms of benevolence. Now the Church is learning to define it also in terms of democracy, is learning that it is not real brotherhood unless there be in it liberty as well as love. This is the great lesson of

the present war for Christianity. It did not need to be taught that the unselfish service of others is the very essence of Christian virtue. That it had long known, even though the practice of it might leave much to be desired. But the lesson of democracy it had never really learned, since it forgot it in the old days of Roman imperialism. It behooves it now so to learn the lesson that it may not be again forgotten. Christians must put an end to their old habit of dubbing all kindness Christian, and must refrain from giving that august name to anything that falls short of the full measure of the genuine Christian principle. They must demand that Christian brotherhood express itself in justice as well as in kindness, a justice that guards the rights and liberties of all men and nations, and assures to all the opportunity for self-expression, self-control, and a share in the duties and responsibilities of the whole human family. "Do ye unto others as ye would that others should do unto you," if it means anything at all, can mean no less than this.

Christian opinion usually follows the prevailing opinion of the world at large. Seldom, to its shame be it said, has the Church ventured upon new paths until common sentiment has pronounced them safe. In the present case we are witnessing the same phenomenon over again. Autocracy is falling under general condemnation and democracy is coming to seem alone righteous. Already there are signs that the Church too is awakening to the lesson of the hour and will soon pronounce unchristian what the world is already pronouncing immoral.

Among the cherished privileges rendered dubious by genuine democracy is the right of an individual or of a nation to count itself peculiarly called to the service of others. Once we should have recognized this without question as admirable and eminently Christian. But Germany's attitude has given us pause. Whether or not

they truly represent her, at any rate many of her writers have pictured her in the present struggle as obeying a divine call to serve the world by imposing her culture upon others less favored than herself. Her superior gifts and endowments, they claim, lay upon her the duty of spreading by any means her higher civilization far beyond her own borders. We are reminded in this of the attitude of many another nation, including our own, toward one and another primitive people. There is much in such an attitude that is praiseworthy, but as exhibited today by Germany it is exciting universal execration. It is not simply the conceit of it that offends the rest of the world, nor even altogether the violence of the means employed, but the violation of the very fundamentals of human intercourse — respect for others and regard for the integrity of their persons and ideals. Again Germany is teaching us all a lesson and pointing a warning. We are beginning to realize that the conquest of the world for the world's good is as unrighteous as the conquest of the world for the world's destruction.

The whole notion of chosen nations is beginning to be looked upon with suspicion. We long ago repudiated the old doctrine of election to special privilege, but we have widely cherished in its place the doctrine of election to special service. But this too, we are now discovering, may encroach dangerously upon democracy and human brotherhood. The danger lies not in assuming a call to service, but such a call as violates the independence of others and puts them beneath us. Even the good of the world is bought too dear at such a price. Democracy is consistent only with the recognition of a universal call. Every man and every nation have their place in the brotherhood of man and in the commonwealth of nations. All are called to serve, each in his own way, and like the several gifts described by the apostle Paul in the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians,

each is essential to the perfection of the whole and is to be held in honor by all.

What I have just been saying inevitably raises the question as to the bearing of all this on education. Does not education mean that we are called to serve the young and immature by imposing upon them the convictions and ideals that are the fruit of our greater experience and wisdom? To state the question is to answer it. Democracy in education means not to impose upon others what we have and to make of them what we are, but so to influence them that they shall work out their own salvation, creating their own characters and developing their own convictions and ideals in the light of the achievements of the race. Not only to give them a knowledge of the past and the present, but also to inspire in them a personality which shall make them masters of that knowledge, not its slaves — this is the duty and the privilege of the wise teacher. Such an attitude — and it is the deliberate attitude of all modern educators — is consistent with the most thoroughgoing democracy; any other attitude consorts only with autocracy.

And may not the same be said of the great work of foreign missions? Too often in the past it has been carried on in a spirit of presumption and bigotry that has elicited in heathen peoples a condemnation and contempt like that we feel for Germany today. But fortunately we are learning the lesson of democracy here as everywhere else. We are growing more becomingly modest and more broadly sympathetic. We are discovering that we can learn from non-christian peoples as well as they from us, that if we are called to serve them, they are called to serve us, and we are realizing that the ideal is not that they shall submissively accept from us what we have to offer, but that they and we together shall work out in the light of our common experiences

something better, something more profoundly and largely human, and — may I not say? — more profoundly and largely Christian, than anything we have hitherto known.

Christianity, as I have said, is learning a lesson from democracy. But it also has, in its turn, a lesson to teach democracy. Democracy means liberty, but liberty is dangerous unless it be permeated with the spirit of service. We have become accustomed, particularly in America, to think of liberty as a good in itself. But whether it be good or bad depends upon the use to which it is put. Liberty is opportunity, and opportunity ill employed is but the fruitful source of evil. Democracy may well be worse in its results than autocracy, if it mean only liberty for universal selfishness. Often indeed it is unlovely enough — quarrelsome, divisive, jealous of other's gifts, eager to get instead of to give, to exploit instead of to serve. If this were what democracy necessarily meant, we might well prefer autocracy. But democracy means this only if its dominating spirit be the spirit of selfishness, and this of all things it dare not be.

Autocracy and selfishness naturally belong together. Democracy requires a soul of another sort. It may well be that democracy, like autocracy, has ordinarily been born of self-interest; that it has sprung commonly from nothing higher than men's desire to protect themselves against the encroachments of their fellows. But a selfish democracy is in a constant state of unstable equilibrium. If every one is thinking only of his own weal, as soon as he grows strong he will instinctively seek to establish himself at the expense of others, and in a society where strong men abound, while the forms of democracy may continue to be observed, its spirit is certain to be progressively violated. We call ourselves a democratic nation, but we are well aware that even here in America democracy is sorely limited. Within the borders of this

commonwealth of ours flourish all sorts of autocracies born of selfishness and greed.

It is this kind of thing that has led many to advocate, in the interest of democracy, the desperate expedient of an enforced equality of fortune and of status for everybody. Strong men are not to be allowed to exercise their strength, because they thereby imperil the rights and encroach upon the privileges of others. Society must be levelled down to the poorest and most inefficient. Much of our modern social radicalism takes this position, and because of it democracy is discredited in many quarters. If this be what democracy means, we may well doubt whether human progress lies along the democratic path. But this is not what democracy means. Its watchword is not bare equality but liberty, and liberty makes room for the largest variety. The classic picture of an ideal democracy is drawn in the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians, to which I have already referred: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit." I should like to quote the whole of the chapter, it is so full of suggestion for the theme I am dealing with. Variety of gifts, but respect for others than one's own; the higher and the lower, the greater and the less, yet all alike honorable; "that there may be no schism in the body, but that the members may have the same care one for another." To distrust democracy and to fancy that it is to be preserved only by enforced and deadening equality is to adopt a counsel of despair. Much better it is to render it secure by endowing it with a spirit congenial to its nature, the spirit of genuine brotherhood.

Democracy is voluntary and depends on mutual goodwill. In the last resort autocracy maintains itself, whether or no, by the power of coercion. But democracy has no such refuge. Its tendency is centrifugal. It lacks the external cohesion of autocracy, and, unless

it be held together by the inner bond of regard for others' good, it is bound to go to pieces.

Is it not then doomed, and are not they right who claim that autocracy is the only permanently practicable form of society? It is well that we should face this issue squarely. We are in the habit of saying that democracy demands intelligence, that it does not work well among immature and ignorant peoples. But we have failed to see that it demands also unselfishness. If it be true that it is impossible to make men unselfish, just as if it be true that it is impossible to make them intelligent, we may as well admit at once that democracy is a failure.

But it is not true. Far from perfect as the world is, it is everywhere blest both under autocracy and under democracy with those who live for others' good as well as for their own. In them is the real hope of democracy. Democracy need not wait until all men are unselfish, any more than public order must wait until all men are orderly. If every one were dishonest and murderous, there could be no public order, but the mass of men being what they are, it is easy to exercise control over the few that need it. Democracy is safe, even though it be not perfect, so long as there is enough unselfishness in it to counteract the disintegrating forces of mere self-interest.

To promote the spirit of unselfishness — this is the specific duty of Christianity, and thus it is that Christianity is called to serve democracy. To Christianize it through and through, to make it human instead of mechanical, to put love and sympathy and the desire to serve in place of indifference and jealousy and greed of personal gain and power. This is Christianity's great duty to the democracy of today and tomorrow. A genuine Christian democracy will emphasize duties and responsibilities rather than rights, what a man owes rather than what is owed him, what he can give rather than what he can get. It will mean interdependence

rather than independence and coöperation rather than competition.

Democracy is often criticised as inefficient. Of course it is inefficient if it means each man for himself. This is complete atomism, and atomism can accomplish nothing. Control is far more efficient, for it enforces unity of purpose and of plan, without which little is ever done. But a genuinely coöperative democracy is the most efficient form of society conceivable. For real coöperation there is room only where there is liberty. Free coöperation for a common end — there is no other power so mighty as this.

But again is this possible? That is the great question for democracy. If it be not, it is well for us clearly to recognize that in the long run there is nothing for the world but autocracy. The more clearly and the more widely this is recognized, the more likely we are to develop the only kind of democracy that can endure. Whether we can compass it, time alone will show. At any rate it is the only state of society worthy to be called the Kingdom of God on earth and the only one worthy to be made the object of Christian faith and effort.

To democratize Christianity and to Christianize democracy — this is the twofold duty facing Christians of today and tomorrow. Of all their duties none is more imperative and more pressing.

I have been speaking only of the ethical problems involved in Christianity and democracy; but it is natural in this place and on an occasion like the present to think also of the theological problems involved. I can speak of only one: What does the reading of Christianity in terms of democracy and of democracy in terms of Christianity mean for our interpretation of God?

It is evident, if we are to have a God consonant with the ethical ideal I have been insisting on — and this we must have or religion will be in lamentable case in these

days of a growing democracy — the two elements, liberty and service, must both be rooted in His character and play their part in His purpose for the world. Our God must not be an irresponsible autocrat to whom men are but puppets and for whose glory they exist. He must be a God to whom their persons are sacred and their liberties too precious to be invaded. Not to dominate and coerce them must be His desire, or to subject them to His omnipotent will, but to lead them into the full liberty of sons of God and to elicit in them that spirit of mutual sympathy and service that shall make of human society a genuine brotherhood. Worship and sacrifice must be less to Him than a free community of purpose and of effort for promoting this supreme end. He must permit us to share with him in the responsibility and in the dignity of the common task. Without the coöperation of men, if He be the God men need, His holy purposes must go unachieved and His holy will remain frustrated. Benevolent, of course, He must be, but benevolent despotism becomes God no more than man. He must be a God who counts it more to serve than to rule. Service of others we count the highest expression of goodness, and we cannot be content with anything less good in God. It is a sound instinct that has led men to recognize Christ as divine, divine not because of his power but because of his love, not because of his resurrection but because of his death. If we are to believe in God at all, it must be in a God like Christ.

The old Church-father, Tertullian, once said that he would rather have a bad God than a weak God. But to us power must be subordinate to character and have worth only as it ministers to it. If we seek power above character or independently of character in God, it is because we are philosophers instead of Christians; or if not that, it is because we desire God to do our work for us, or to guarantee its being done whether we and

others bear our part or not. Such an attitude befits only those whose trust is in autocracy and to whom democracy seems but a broken reed.

Above all we need a God who shall represent to us our highest ideals and through faith in whom their divineness may be assured, a God in worshipping whom we are at the summit of moral devotion and achievement, and in serving whom we best serve our fellows and contribute most efficiently to the building of a true Christian democracy here on earth. Our faith in God means at least two things: that the sacred object of our hope and prayer and effort is divine, and that being divine it will ultimately prevail. Not that God will make it prevail by the exercise of divine power. Rather that, being divine, it will increasingly gather to itself the devotion and the sacrifice of the worshippers of God and the lovers of their brethren, and will make them strong to conquer and achieve. Faith in God divorced from faith in man is no faith for the Christian of today. Not faith in God instead of faith in man, not faith in God because of our despair of man, but faith in God because we believe in man and are confident that he will not be disobedient to the heavenly vision when once his eyes are opened to it.